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ABSTRACT

A public forum on community water quality was conducted by tenth grade students participating in the University of Alabama's Biomedical Sciences Preparatory Program (BioPrep). BioPrep was designed to provide rural high school students with an intensified education concentrating on mathematics, science, communication, rural life, health, and medicine. For four weeks students from five rural high schools in three Alabama counties--Greene, Hale, and Tuscaloosa--focused their attention on water quality issues and utilized social science research techniques learned in the BioPrep accelerated curricula during the school year to examine the structure and organization of their counties, to assess legal, financial, educational, and public services elements, to identify demographic characteristics, and to assess the health care system. The students interviewed officials and workers in county agencies and institutions as well as citizens to identify problems. Finally they developed possible solutions to the problems. The transcript of students' presentations includes explanations of research methodology, research results, and implications of identified problems and proposed solutions. The transcript of a panel discussion includes student questions about county issues and quality of life. (LFL)

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ISSUES RELATED TO THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN WEST ALABAMA

PROCEEDINGS AND TRANSCRIPT OF A PUBLIC FORUM

BIOPREP SUMMER PROGRAM

JULY 5, 1984

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INTRODUCTION

The "Forum on Issues Related to the Quality of Life in West Alabama" was conducted by the tenth grade students participating in the University of Alabama's Biomedical Sciences Preparation Program (BioPrep). An experimental program, BioPrep was designed to provide rural high school students with an intensified education, concentrating on mathematics, science, communication, rural living, and health and medicine. Students from five rural high schools in three Alabama counties, Greene, Hale, and Tuscaloosa, engage in the program's accelerated curricula during the school year and participate in special complementary activities held on weekends and during the summer at the University of Alabama and other locations. This Forum climaxed the activities of the second special summer session, and provided the students the opportunity to present to the public the initial results of the research they had conducted during the preceding four weeks on the University of Alabama campus and in their home counties.

Students utilized research techniques and procedures they learned during the course of the previous academic year to examine the structure and organization of their counties, including an assessment of the legal, financial, educational, and public service elements constituting each; to identify relevant demographic characteristics of their counties; and to assess the system of health care and health care organizations functioning in their counties. Through interviewing officials and workers in county agencies and institutions, and by conducting interviews with citizens they identified problems and concerns facing each county and then developed possible solutions to the problems. In all of this, the central theme around which their investigation focused was water, because the quality of water and water supply both represents and reflects the quality of life available to citizens in these counties.

The summer research program conducted by BioPrep students was sponsored jointly by the University of Alabama and the West Alabama Planning and Development Council. It was funded by the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation and the William Randolph Hearst Foundation.

Troy Carroll: Good evening. My name is Troy Carroll. I am in the BioPrep Program in Hale County. I have been asked to explain this year's summer program to you and to explain what will be going on tonight. Before I start, I would like to welcome all of our parents, panel members and distinguished guests. We are very glad you could come.

This year our summer program concentrated on the quality of life in the tri-county area involved in the BioPrep program: Tuscaloosa, Hale, and Greene Counties. Our main focus in the quality of life was water supply and water quality. This is because water is so closely related to so many of the factors that contribute to the quality of life. These factors range from health to recreation, even to attracting industry for new jobs. You can see that it has a big impact on the quality of life. During the first week we spent at the University of Alabama we listened to speakers and worked on research and getting prepared for the two weeks in the counties. Some of our speakers represented the Army Corps of Engineers and the American Geological Survey, just to name a few.

While we were in the counties, we used various methods to get our information. One of them was the organizational interview, sometimes called the agency interview. With this we interviewed county political leaders, people in health occupations, or public service occupations. We asked them questions about their job and how their job affected the quality of life in the county. Another method we used was the citizen interview. This was the basic man-on-the-street type of interview. We stopped people on the street, asking questions from a structured interview questionnaire we had, to find out general information about the population and some of their attitudes. But, due to time, we could not get a random sampling of citizens.

Here is the breakdown of the responses we got from our citizen interviews. In the less than 20 year of age category we had a total of 11 percent respondents; actually, in the state of Alabama in that age group there is 29.8 percent. We purposely tried to select people who were older than that. In the 21 to 60 years old, we had 73 percent of our respondents. That age group, according to the 1980 census, makes up 58.9 percent in the state. In the elderly category there are 16 percent of the people who are 61 years or older in the state. In our survey, there was only 11.3 percent. You can see we had alot of varying there, according to the census.

In addition to the interviews we did while we were in the counties, we would go to the library and research the history of our county, and we would also take tours of various places. They included the water filtration plant, the sewage disposal plant, and the catfish farms and centers, and we even got to go on canoe trips.

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So, tonight at this forum we, the students, are going to present the results of our work. First is a slide presentation, then students from each county will present some of the problems they found while they were in the county, some of the possible solutions to these problems, and our speculation on the future of these counties. Following that there will be a panel discussion. This will be a discussion between two panels, one consisting of students from the counties and one of distinguished citizens from the counties. They will ask each other questions, supply comments, and talk about the information we present here. It should be very interesting. I hope you enjoy your evening.

Now will be the videotapes and slide presentations, which will show what we did in our two weeks away in the counties.

(Slide presentations produced by students were shown at this point.)

Troy Carroll: One thing I forgot to mention. All of the students who worked on these videotapes learned how to use the equipment to produce these shows themselves. I think we should give them a round of applause for that.

Next we are going to have students from each county present the results of their work in their county. First will be Greene County. Presenting will be Cedric Harris, Shanda Edwards, and Lynn Gaines.

PRESENTATIONS

Greene County

Cedric Harris: Good evening. Tonight, we, the BioPrep students from Greene County, will discuss our research project of the past two weeks. Yours truly, Cedric Harris, will discuss the problems facing Greene County today. Shanda Edwards will discuss what can be done to solve these problems. And Lynnetta Gaines will discuss what the county will look by the year 2000.

Greene County faces many problems, such as unemployment, inefficiency in government, lack of hospital care, lack of unity in government, and minimal knowledge of present water quality. The population of Greene County is presently 11,021. This includes 76 percent black residents and 24 percent white residents. From studies conducted in the county in the past two weeks, it was determined that the biggest problem facing Greene County in 1984 is unemployment. The county has the second largest unemployment rate among the surrounding counties. Surveys stated that Greene County had a 16.2 percentage rate of unemployment. The reason for this unemployment is because Greene County is

presently operating far below its industrial potential, there being at present fewer than five factories operating in Greene County.

Another problem is health care, according to the citizen survey. Presently 81 percent of the citizens' family doctors were in Greene County, and 89 percent of the citizens choose to go to a hospital outside of the county, contrasted to 11 percent staying in the county.

Another problem the county faces is inefficiency in government. In many instances people who are not adequately qualified are elected to hold policial offices. This problem within itself presents an even bigger problem because these officials only have a minimal amount of knowledge in many important areas, such as the county's present water quality.

The most important concern of the Greene County BioPrep students is the lack of communic tion and cooperation between black and whites, today on al levels, including the government level. Presently, the cou y government consists of 100 percent blacks and the city o ficials consist of 100 percent whites.

Shanda Edwards: There can be some solutions to these problems. For instance, the population can increase due to more industry coming to the county. There will be more industry due to more efficient usage of Greene County's vast supply of natural resources. This widespread industrial development of Greene County will also solve the unemployment problem. However, city planners have projected that most of this development will be centered around "The Cross Roads of America Industrial Park" in Boligee. There are two railroads, two interstates, and the Tombigbee Waterway going through this area which will provide transportation and facilities for industry to settle near the industrial park. Yet the special features of the ruralness of Greene County can be preserved by isolating industry in certain areas.

The health care situation will be improved by better education in the county schools. Also, programs brought into Greene County, such as the BioPrep Program, can increase the educational level of the citizens of Greene County and in turn will help produce more medical personnel from Greene County and encourage them to come back and practice medicine there.

The government official problem can be solved by improved requirements for elected officials and their staffs. In other words, government workers will have to achieve high educational levels by taking courses annually to improve their knowledge in their various fields. The BioPrep students found during our interviews that knowledge of the water situation was not widespread among our

officials. Officials should have to have a greater knowledge about all aspects of our counties, including the quality of water.

The only way that the racial problems and lack of togetherness among blacks and whites can be alleviated is by everyone giving in a little and sitting down and discussing their problems. This will only be solved by time and a willingness to listen to each other.

Lynnetta Gaines: Looking to the future, the year 2000 looks bright and prosperous for Greene County. The BioPrep students at Greene County foresee Greene County as one of the most upcoming and productive counties in Alabama by the year 2000.

The residential population is predicted by the Army Corps of Engineers to increase by 10 percent to 11,918. This will include an even number of blacks and whites. People will soon realize the wonderful potential of Greene County and see that it is a very good place to live. Unemployment can be virtually obsolete by the year 2000 because there will be a larger number of industries opening up in Greene County in the industrial park.

According to our citizen survey, 75 percent of the Greene County residents are for this industrial development and 25 percent are against it.

According to the soil conservationist, farming can again become an important part of the quality of life in Greene County. If small farms will change to truck farming, catfish farms, or even to raising fresh water shrimp, the possibility of these farms prospering will be great. By careful planning, industrial development can procede in a controlled manner that will provide jobs yet will protect the beautiful environment in which we live in Greene County.

The health care situation in Greene County should have vastly improved by the year 2000. There should be at least one more hospital or general hospital made out of the present one with round-the-clock health service available. The number of citizens with family physicians in the county should increase to almost 100 percent and the number of citizens using hospitals within the county should increase to over 80 percent, whereas the number going out of the county for hospital care should decrease to just under 20 percent.

However, by the year 2000 county officials will have hopefully more knowledge to solve these problems, from education to the water quality of Greene County.

By that year there should be a 50/50 percentage of blacks and whites working together in both city and county offices. This will lead to a vast improvement of roads, sewage, and other county problems.

Troy Carroll: The next county will be Hale County. The speakers for that county will be Paula Plummer, Tara Tubbs, and Susan Allen.

Hale County

Paula Plummer: We are the BioPrep students from Hale County. I am Paula Plummer, and I am going to discuss the present problems of Hale County. Tara Tubbs will discuss the changes that we wish to have happen by the year 2000, and Susan Allen is going to explain how these changes might happen.

By interviewing citizens and local officials in Hale County, we found several problems that seem to be of major concern. One of the main problems in the county is unemployment. In 1982, 20.6 percent of Hale County's population was unemployed. County officials think this is largely due to a lack of industrial growth. This high percentage is also affected by the national economic recession.

Another problem found in Hale County is the lack of trust in the local health services available. Most of the people we interviewed would not attend Hale County Hospital, but would instead go to another hospital located out of the county. This is mainly due to the lack of qualified medical personnel available to the hospital. For a 28 bed hospital, there are only 4 doctors and 18 registered nurses, and the hospital does not have a doctor on duty at all times. Nineteen percent of the people we interviewed rated the health services above average, 53 percent rated it average, and 26 percent rated it below average.

From our organizational interviews we learned that many of our county officials are unable to explain just what their duties are. When we asked some of our study officials to explain their duties, they just gave us pamphlets, and said "Just look it up in here." On the other hand, there were some officials who were very helpful in providing us with information about Hale County.

Tara Tubbs: Paula has given you the present problems of Hale County and why they exist. Now I am going to present to you a picture. Give your mind a chance to wander, a chance to imagine how we would like our county to be in the year 2000. Will there be new industry, more jobs, more recreation, higher education standards, better health facilities, and better qualified government officials?

By the year 2000, we would like full employment in Hale County. If we do not solve the problem of unemployment, the population of this county will continue to decrease. In 1984, for the people ages 20 to 45, which we will refer to as the main work force, the population is 5,073. If we do not take the action that is needed to provide jobs for people of our county the population of the main work force would decrease to 4,820 people by the year 2000. Within our population the middle age group, 31 to 60, is more likely to be employed full time. Therefore, we must try to get more industry into our county to keep the working population with us.

By the year 2000 Hale County hopes to have another source of water. And if we are successful in getting a new well built, this will help us attract new industry.

When looking at our educational level, we see that there is room for improvement. We foresee higher educational standards for Hale County. One way to raise the educational standards is to raise the qualifications needed in order to become an educator in our county. After our teachers have become better qualified, they will be more capable of educating their pupils and encouraging them to continue their education past the twelfth grade.

Statistics from the Alabama County Data Book show that only 6.7 percent of the population over 25 years of age have a college degree. Would it not be nice if the decimal point in that number was moved one place to the right, to become 67 percent?

We hope the level of health care in Hale County will be better in the year 2000. In 1981, statistics show that not enough doctors were available to serve the population. With the help of the BioPrep Program and others of its kind, we will be able to bring doctors and others in the medical profession to areas like the tri-county area, of which we are a part.

Also, we, as the future of Hale County, will play a major role in this county's progress. If we allow ourselves to become more aware of the issues we are facing and to become educated enough to make the right decisions, we will be able to elect the county, city, state, and national officials who will act in the best interest of the people.

Susan Allen: Paula and Tara just presented the problems facing Hale County and what Hale County should be around the turn of the century. I will be suggesting possible solutions.

By using available resources Hale County can cultivate more jobs without harming available acreage for farming or the natural environment. The Black Warrior River forms the western boundary of Hale County. A port or dock could be

built on the Black Warrior River which would help with industrial development because it would provide a cheaper form of transportation. Building the port or dock would also create many jobs for unemployed people. Timber products comprise a major resource for Hale County. By building a chipping plant and a dock, the wood could be processed and then transported out of the county, again providing needed jobs.

One of our organizational interviews revealed that Hale County does not offer enough available water to attract new industry. The mayor of Greensboro hopes to correct this problem within the next five years by building a new well.

Hale County has many recreational attractions. These include the Mound State Monument, a national forest located in northeast Hale County, Lake Payne in the southern portion of the county, and a number of historical structures located within the county that were left untouched during the Civil War. There are many resources available for hunting and fishing. These attractions could be further developed to create more recreation facilities and job opportunities.

The quality of education effects everyone. Raising the level of education in Hale County could be done by enforcing a local standard that teachers must meet, and by raising teachers' salaries. Industries need qualified workers to work when they locate, so raising the educational level would provide better qualified workers for these industries. If Hale County raises its standard of education it would raise the quality of life in this county.

The people in Hale County are generally dissatisfied with the Hale County government. The more people are aware of their county government the more they can do about it. By raising the educational level Hale County can cause people to be more aware of the political problems and also provide better qualified candidates.

The citizens in Hale County are also dissatisfied with the Hale County Hospital. This situation could be rectified by increasing the number of qualified doctors and nurses working at the hospital. Increasing the number of qualified doctors would make it possible for a doctor to be on call at the hospital 24 hours a day.

If these possible solutions were followed, the Hale County BioPrep students foresee that the quality of life will improve in Hale County.

Troy Carroll: The last county to present their results tonight will be Tuscaloosa County. Presenting for them will be Danita Taylor, Tonya McDaniel, and Anita Parker.

Tuscaloosa County

Danita Taylor: The year 2000 is rapidly approaching. As we enter into this new era, new advancements in all forms of technology will be made. Economics, the ecology, the per capita income, service-related jobs and others will all undergo changes. You have heard the purpose of this forum tonight. I will now give you an idealistic view of Tuscaloosa County in the year 2000 from the data collected. The views are taken from the citizen and organization interviews as well as comments and opinions of the public.

As this summer session was sponsored in part by the West Alabama Planning and Development Council, a study of the environment was very important. Water and its role in the quality of life was the essence of our summer study. In Tuscaloosa County, it was found that 10 percent of the population less than 30 years of age had lived in a home without running water. By the year 2000, it is quite possible that no one will have to live without this necessity due to improved conditions between the county and its townships. This will be the result of county-wide water systems and the cooperation of the citizens and officials. Pollution, which so readily kills many of our waterways, will be kept to a minimum. The general public will take an interest in our lakes and rivers, and will help keep them free of litter and waste from industries. With less pollution, the waterways will continue to be a major source of recreation. Swimming and fishing opportunities will be abundant. Families will have outings on our shores and banks such as picnics and get-togethers.

Forty-eight percent of the people interviewed rated the quality of our natural environment as average. With increased public awareness and participation and the help of our public officials, the quality of Tuscaloosa's environment will surely multiply. Our trees and swamplands will grow strong and beautiful, providing a basis for wildlife to thrive.

Our schools are the center of many controversies today. By 2000, our schools should have improved greatly, due in part again to public support. There will be better teachers as a result of a more thorough education, and therefore they will be more qualified to teach. There will be better courses to provide challenges for the students and give them a better background for job opportunities. Better courses and teachers naturally generate better students who will be interested in their classes, do better in college, and become contributing adults in Tuscaloosa society.

Fifty-six percent of the whites interviewed rated the health care quality in Tuscaloosa County as "above average" while only 35 percent of the blacks gave that same rating.

Increasing the availability of health care services and improving the quality of those which already exist for minority residents should raise these ratings.

Sixteen percent of the people interviewed were unemployed. As the percentage has steadily decreased over the years, by 2000 the figure should be relatively very low. The county's officials are in the middle of the debate involving industry and the environment. They want the people to have jobs and yet want to protect the environment from harmful effects. By the year 2000, they should be able to have both and to invite industries into the cities where they are needed. The citizens will once again have jobs in their own fields and will not have to commute to neighboring counties.

Many of the agencies we interviewed complained of a lack of funds which limited the amount of help they could be to the county. By the year 2000, hopefully, things will have changed, and our agencies which contribute so much to our county will no longer be underfunded.

I know that some of what I have just said may be superficial; however, I believe that Tuscaloosa County is a land of vast opportunity. With the help of county and city officials, perhaps some of the dreams and hopes of Tuscaloosa's citizens will be recognized and made possible.

Tonya McDaniel: You have just heard an example of an idealistic view of Tuscaloosa County in the year 2000. If some changes are not made within the forthcoming years, Tuscaloosa will be nothing like it was just described.

Our environment will be dirty and polluted beyond any methods of clean-up. The lakes and other waterways, which are our most valuable source of water, will be contaminated with chemicals and trash. The pollution will spur drastic growth in algae, thus killing our fish and decreasing the value of our lakes as a source of water and recreation. With this great amount of trash and pollution in our water systems their recreational value will be almost completely destroyed. No one will want to swim or fish in the water. Nor will anyone want to have picnics on the shores. The scenery around these water systems will probably be nonexistent because the trees and vegetation, as well as the animals, depend on the water supply for survival. Because the water is so contaminated many of the animals will also be dead.

The amount of our natural land will be very limited in the year 2000. Our forests, which were so abundant at the turn of the century, are rapidly disappearing. They are being cut to meet the demands of society. By the year 2000 there may not even be any forest land left unless we begin

to conserve them. Our natural swamplands are also being destroyed as a direct result of the re-channeling of many of our waterways. Much of what used to be swampland has been drained. Because of this, much wildlife has disappeared and the swampland which is left is becoming polluted. By the year 2000 the only place to even see or find out about swamplands may be from books or computers. North River is a prime example of the type of damage caused by re-channeling of waterways. When the dam which created Lake Tuscaloosa was built, many woodland areas were flooded, causing many environmental changes. There were benefits as well as negative effects on the existing environment. Many scenic areas were flooded and will never be seen again, but it also created a vast amount of shoreline and a prime water supply.

Today the population of Tuscaloosa County is about 116,000. By the year 2000 it is estimated to be 139,000. Already much of our farm land has been turned into housing subdivisions and apartment complexes in the southern part of the county. With an increase of 23,000 people there will be very little land left for farming and wildlife. Almost every thing will be paved and "developed."

By the year 2000 our school systems will be in serious trouble. Our teachers will be less qualified and severely under paid. Because of the lack of funding there will be a shortage of teachers and a limited number of courses provided, cutting the number of students who are qualified to go to college or even to find a decent job after graduation. The students will probably view school as a place to eat and make friends. They will not be interested in school, and they will probably contribute very little to society.

Today, 39 percent of the people we interviewed felt the health care services offered in Tuscaloosa were above average. If more funding for the health services is not provided, by the year 2000 they will be inadequate and poor. If the government continues to cut funding at the rate it is now, a good percentage of the health programs provided today will no longer be offered. The citizens of Tuscaloosa will know very little about the health programs that will be provided. Even today there are many programs provided that are virtually unknown. Of the people we interviewed, only 37 percent earning less than $10,000 annually rated health care above average. Yet 66 percent of those people earning more than $20,000 annually felt is was above average. Recent changes in governmental health programs will probably only accentuate the differences in opinions of those with different incomes.

Today the unemployment rate is 16 percent; by the year 2000 it will probably be increased to about 20 or 25 percent. While talking to one Tuscaloosa official, it was

mentioned that Tuscaloosa has a bad reputation as a striking county because of the number of strikes which have occurred in the past. Tuscaloosa also has a bad reputation because it has not been promoted in the past the way it should have been. By the year 2000, what type of reputation will the county have? Because of the lack of jobs, people with bachelor's and master's degrees will be working at fast food restaurants for minimum wage or at other jobs which are completely out of their field. More people will also be commuting to other areas of the state to work. Because of the lack of jobs, people will have to depend more on the government for financial support. Because there will be a growth in the population Tuscaloosa's entertainment and business sections will be greatly underdeveloped.

If improvements are not made somewhere, the quality of life in Tuscaloosa County will drop from average to poor by the year 2000. It's irrational to think that with all of the changes made, Tuscaloosa will like the idealistic view described, but with a few changes at least it will not be as I just described.

Anita Parker: You have heard the idealistic and the status quo views of Tuscaloosa County. Now I would like to talk about some current problems facing our county and some possible solutions for these problems.

One of the biggest problems in Tuscaloosa County, according to the results of our citizen interviews, is unemployment. While bringing new industry into the county would be a step toward solving the unemployment problem, it could create environmental problems. We will have to find a way to bring new industry to Tuscaloosa County and also keep our environment clean.

One possible solution would be to encourage industries which produce low amounts of pollution to come to Tuscaloosa County. Examples of these types of industries, obtained from the Chamber of Commerce are: Phifer Wire Products, Rochester Products and General Motors, and Atrax Research Development. Future companies would include assembly plants and research companies. By encouraging these types of industries, there would be more jobs produced and less pollution. If we encourage agricultural and dairy industries we will conserve our natural resources yet provide some job opportunities.

After many interviews at different government offices, we found that the major concern of most officials was to increase the number of available jobs, but to also keep the environment clean. We feel that, unless there is some compromise, our environment will suffer greatly.

We face a problem with the amount of pollution and trash which flows into the rivers, lakes, and streams. One

possible solution we thought of would be to filter the run-off which flows from parking lots and other paved areas. Also, we feel that it would be a good idea to provide farmers with information about the dangers of the pesticides they use on their crops. A solution to the trash problem would be to encourage people not to litter, but to recycle more paper, aluminum, and glass than they already do. We feel that stricter standards for dumping hazardous waste should be enforced by our local, state, and federal governments. Another idea would be to start a water education program to let people know what is in their water and how to conserve their water. We feel that these programs should be included in the health classes that are supposed to be required in all schools.

Tuscaloosa County residents saw a great problem with the school system. The schools could use new equipment and more qualified teachers. More tax money could be given to schools. Also, property taxes could be raised to provide more money for the school systems. People might not agree with this idea now, but the long-term benefits would outweigh their doubts. The results of our survey show that people with a higher educational level would make more money and therefore be able to pay slightly higher taxes.

A more educated public is usually more aware of the problems of the day. We feel that it is the duty of our government officials to make sure that the people they represent are at least aware of the problems faced by their county or district.

The problem with health care is another which needs to be resolved. Tuscaloosa County provides health and health-related services to residents of Tuscaloosa and surrounding counties. One problem is the lack of funding for these services. Each year hospitals must buy more advanced and more expensive equipment, yet each year their budgets shrink. Another problem is the lack of public knowledge about these services. In Tuscaloosa County, people with higher income and educational levels rated the quality of health care higher than the people with less income and less education. This means that those with higher income are probably better informed than the people with lower incomes. Each department has pamphlets about the services they provide, but these pamphlets stay in their offices. We feel that it would be better if the information was distributed to the public, especially the lower income levels, and lectures for the public were provided by these organizations.

Less than 10 percent of the people interviewed rated the quality of life in Tuscaloosa County below average. This proves that people are generally satisfied with life in Tuscaloosa County. Yet people also want progress, but

forget the progress brings problems. If one is aware of the problems caused by progress, then one can work at solving these problems. With an informed public, progress and a high quality of life are possible.

Troy Carroll: Next will be a panel discussion between students and distinguished guests from the counties. Making up our student panel we have Rolando Outland and Mary Armstead from Greene County, from Hale County we have Selvin Green, and from Tuscaloosa County we have Anita Parker and Mark Skelton. On our distinguished guest panel will be Mr. Lewis McCray (Executive Director, West Alabama Planning and Development Council), Mr. Dan Butler (Hale County Superintendent of Education), Mr. Booker Cook (Greene County Planner), and Mr. Buddy Lavender (Mayor of Boligee in Greene County).

PANEL DISCUSSION

Mary Armstead: (Directed to Mr. Buddy Lavender) What growth potentials do you see in the area of Boligee?

Mr. Buddy Lavender: Young lady, I think we have a great growth potential in the city of Boligee due to the growth of the American Industrial Park, which we are developing right now. It is running about a $13 million project which should increase the growth in Greene County tremendously.

Mary Armstead: Do you feel that the water system in Boligee is adequate?

Mr. Lavender: No, it is not.

Mary Armstead: Why?

Mr. Lavender: We are running into a problem right now and we are working real hard to solve this problem, but the problem that we are running into is the old original well was pumping sand, and we had to go in and put smaller screens in tnere to fit the state requirements. And we can't produce the amount of water we are using. We have a signed agreement right now with the industrial board and the city of Eutaw to go in on that water system which will give us an additional 500 gallons a minute in excess of what we need, so it will be adequate within the next couple of weeks.

Mary Armstead: Thank you very much.

Selvin Green: (Directed to Mr. Dan Butler) In some of our organization interviews we addressed some people who avoided some of our questions or failed to answer them in a proper way. So I would like to ask you how do you think we could upgrade the quality of our county government?

Mr. Dan Butler: That is a real question for the superintendent of education there. I think we could expect more of our county officials, let our views be known, and our expectations of them. I think we could get to know the folks and let them become aware of who we are. I think that we should be able, as citizens, or willing to give more of ourselves, rather than being so passive. Apathy, as we call it sometimes. As far as education, I think we need to establish some higher expectations of our teachers and students. We need to expect that the local people support us more, we need to inform the public more.

Selvin Green: (Directed to Mr. Lewis McCray) What seems to attract more industry to these rural areas and invariably supply more jobs?

Mr. Lewis McCray: Attracting industry is a difficult task. Everybody talks about wanting to attract more industry, we want more industries to solve our unemployment. It is just like the store owner on the corner. How does he get more business? He has got to be aggressive, he has got to offer what is needed, he has got to be competitive. If we are going to have economic expansion or industrial growth, we have to do the same thing. We have to have what is needed for industry to come in or to expand, we have to be aggressive and unified about breaking it in, and we have got to be competitive. I would like to go back to a question the gentleman asked a moment ago about how to upgrade county government in the counties. Do you know what percentage of people voted in Hale County during the last general election with qualified votes?

Selvin Green: No, I don't.

Mr. McCray: It is always less than 50 percent and you are never going to upgrade local government until the people participate. You are never going to have good candidates until the people who are good offer themselves to the county. And you who are young are in the smallest percentage of participating voters, those from age 18 to 25, that will be the smallest percentage of qualified voters who could vote that will vote. The older people, a higher percentage will vote and you who are young and clamor for the right to vote or your predecessors clamored for the right to vote a few years ago need to exercise that right, and need to be very sincere about it and study the candidates. But if a small group of people can elect somebody to local government then the local government is going serve a small group of people.

Rolando Outland: (Directed to Mr. Booker Cook) What are some problems of water quality in Greene County and how are they going about solving the problems?

Mr. Booker Cook: One of the problems is that there is comparatively a small amount of people receiving water in Greene County, presently it is about 45 percent, in cooperation with municipalities. The Greene County Commission is in the process of implementing a Greene County Water and Sewer Authority. In fact we started on Phase A of that contract and afterwards, at the end of this year, there will be approximately 78 percent of the people in Greene County on water, as well as the preparation for industry. The lines running to the industrial sites are from 10 inches to 16 inches and we ran a water system directly to our industrial park with a large enough well to service industry. So we are in the process of solving that problem.

Mary Armstead: Could you give the audience a rundown about how the Branch Heights situation exists, so I could ask a few questions on that?

Mr. Cook: It is a 200 unit public housing unit in Greene County. When it was originally built it had its own sewer system and they have been having problems with the sewer system and they have been petitioning the city of Eutaw to hook onto its waste water system. The city of Eutaw does not have the capacity to take on Branch Heights, but then again the government has applied for an EPA grant with which we had hoped to expand the sewer system and will be able to take that housing unit onto there.

Mary Armstead: Do you know what brought about this sewage/water problem?

Mr. Cook: Inadequate design--when it was built it was never done properly. It was lack of building inspectors doing their jobs and making sure the contractors used appropriate equipment as the engineer or designer had dictated that they should do in the plans.

Mary Armstead: We asked two people questions about Branch Heights. We asked past Mayor Tucks and he said they tried to get the county government to build Branch Heights in the city limits. When we talked to Mr. Posey, who is in charge of Branch Heights, he said they did not try in any way to build it in the city.

Mr. Cook: I was not the planner of Greene County during the construction of Branch Heights, but I do know for a fact that in, I believe, 1976 and 1978 Branch Heights had petitioned the city council of Eutaw to become incorporated within the municipality, and on both occasions that was rejected. Branch Heights is predominantly black, and as you know the city government is all white. Their race does play a part in it, I know alot of people do not like to mention these things but we live in a society in which many of our institutions are pervaded with racism.

Mary Armstead: Due to racism being such a big problem in Greene County, do you know of any kind of way to go about bringing unity between blacks and whites among Greene County or other places? I feel if they were to unite, then everything would be fine and better.

Mr. Lavender: Sit down and talk.

Mary Armstead: I am talking about how we can get them to sit down and talk.

Mr. Cook: I think more things could be done, like, even if we were to revert to showing different films and having various groups to sit down together as the man has indicated and talk so we could have better race relations. I don't see it as being dim, I think things will get better. Attitudinal change is an evolutionary process, it just takes time.

Mr. McCray: I think that you found doing the interviews that the citizens of Greene County have realized that they need better qualified people in the government. By doing this you are going to have people who are going to be willing to sit down and talk to one another. And if you can talk, you can work out any problem in the world.

Mr. Cook: I would agree with the statement made that inefficiency in government is due to the ability of the elected officials. In America we do not elect presidents from Harvard, usually they are from Hollywood. It is the same kind of mentality. The intellect in America has been more or less looked at with a suspicious look. We elect average people, everywhere.

Mr. McCray: Well, we elect them because the people at Harvard will not run. The reason that successful business people will not run is because of the low pay of elected officials. The real problem they have is that they have to be available to every person 24 hours a day. You say to them whatever you want to and they have practically no recourse. If you will look at the Congress of the United States, this year a number of members of congress who went there 4, 6, and 8 years ago are articulate young people. They are leaving congress simply because of what a congressman has to do. I was on a congressman's staff for a number of years, and I could not take it any more. You could not go to church. One time we were burying a rural mail carrier, before we could get him in the ground, people were pulling on my arm wanting to know if they could get the appointment to take his place. At least we could bury the man before we begin talking about who will take his place! That is why what you as constituents subject elected officials to will determine the timing. If you get good people and if you pay them well, and they perform, you will not always agree with them. But when you disagree you do not have to do like we tried

here in Tuscaloosa a few years ago. I thought one of the best steps we ever took was moving our garbage out to the curb. It was easier on the garbage workers, they did not have to carry heavy smelling garbage cans for long ways, and yet they tried to impeach the city street commissioner. He saved the city $500,000 a year.

Back to your original question about Eutaw, the more intelligent people are, the better educated they are, and the more solutions they will find to problems. I emphasize that because you have a real chance to solve problems. Maybe my generation does not have a chance any more, I don't know.

Selvin Green: Mr. McCray, what effects do you think the Tombigbee Waterway will have on this area?

Mr. McCray: The Tombigbee Waterway is going to be good for America, it is going to provide economical transportation, it is going to benefit Mobile a great amount. It is going to benefit Demopolis and our area second, because the two rivers fork at Demopolis. There is not going to be wall to wall factories along the Tombigbee River, we do not have the labor market to support it. And industry, in my judgement, is not going to go to an area where the labor market is not available. It will go where raw materials are available. If raw materials are there, they can bring it in. There will be some improvement in some of our areas. The area where the interstate, railroad, and the river cross in the southern part of Greene County and the northern part of Sumter County, that industrial park should be a plus for that area, and it will help people as far away as Tuscaloosa. The bridge at Pickensville will help in this part of Alabama with employment at the papermill in Mississippi. But I go back to what I said before about industrial development, you have got to have what is needed, you have got to be aggressive, and you have got to be competitive. And I do not mean competitive in the manner that you have got to give and give and give to get industry. Good industries come in and they want to pay their fair share, they do not want to pay more, but those who come and demand concessions on every single thing, "run us a water and sewer line, and we don't want to pay for it, give us tax breaks" and this type of thing. I don't think that industry is going to be too big of a plus, but the Tombigbee River in your lifetime will not effect the area it goes through in Alabama a whole lot.

Selvin Green: On that same subject, we know that such attempts to improve the environment or a city has its advantages and disadvantages. What are some of the future disadvantages of the waterway and how are you working to solve them?

Mr. McCray: There are no disadvantages of the waterway. The advantages are, as I have said, economical transportation

for America, recreational areas it will provide. There are no real disadvantages; everything that happens will be an improvement in the Pickens County and the Greene County and Sumter County area, all down until it gets to Mobile. It will not hurt the environment. Our environment should be just as well off with the Tombigbee as it was before, we will not have any endangered species that we will lose in that area, in my belief. So I don't see any disadvantages, I see alot of advantages.

Now the one area that we can improve in the Tombigbee area is recreation, and that is attracting the week-end, the two weeks, the three days, the five days people to come from the larger metropolitan areas, Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, and so forth, who will build small week-end cabins in the recreational areas of the river. This will provide some economic emphasis in some of the areas there for purchasing such things as food, supplies, gas, and boat repairs and so forth. Over at Pickensville there will be a dock facility which is going to be a plus and also that is the half way point, where there should be an opportunity for refueling stations and perhaps some maintenance work. The number of tugboats will increase rapidly, and the companies in this area who are tugboat companies will make large investments in that equipment.

Selvin Green: I am not too familiar with the waterway, but is it supposed to attract industry?

Mr. McCray: Well, the waterway itself being there does not have a magnet that will attract anything to it. The people, if I go back to my original statement, they have got to have what is needed for industry, they have got to be competitive, and they have got to be aggressive in going out and making available the resources and assets of their area for industrial development. The river itself, the Warrior River was modernized; now we have got to do the Oliver Lock and Dam over. But 44 years ago when I worked on a tugboat on the Warrior River it took a long time to get through all of the locks, because they were so small. Now they have cut down the travel time from Mobile to Birmingport to a couple or three days, I guess. But the river itself, it being there will not do it. The Tombigbee was developed to help industrialize this area, to help the economic expansion of this area, but this area has got to go out and get it. Just saying the river is here, "lets all sit back and wait til it floats down the river," it ain't gonna float down the river.

Mr. Lavender: They have got to prepare for industry, then they have got to go out and look for it and tell them what they have got. Actually they have got to be good salesmen to sell the county and the product to the people away from here to attract the people to build here. They are not going to come here because the river is developed. Because the

Warrior River has been down to Greene County but for over 50 years has not brought anyone in. Unless we prepare for the Tombigbee, we are not going to have anything on the other side either, but we are preparing down there for it. We are using $13 million to attract industry. Now we have got to get a salesman to go out and find it and bring it in.

Mr. McCray: The Crossroads of America is the only place that I know of on the Tombigbee River that the industrial site is prepared. If you go to any other place along the river, if you can identify industrial sites, there are no water and sewage lines to it, there are no roads to it, there is no electricity to it. And like Mayor Lavender said you have got to get those prepared. And it is expensive, it is costly to run water and sewer lines and have the capacity to treat the sewage, build the proper roads into it, lay out the park, it is a costly situation. And some people say "Well as soon as we get an industry, we are going to buy the site and develop it." It will not work that way.

Selvin Green: Are there certain types of industries that will be allowed to build along the waterway?

Mr. McCray: Any of them that want to. There is no zoning along the river. There is no prohibition of any type industry along the river.

Mr. Cook: I think the local citizens would not want to bring something in there that would have an environmental impact that would be harmful. I think they would be as eager to have that in as they would certain types of other industry coming into the county.

Selvin Green: So you say factories that may consist of large smokestacks or whatever can be built along this waterway?

Mr. Lavender: They have developed acid burners to go on these smokestacks, so virtually no pollution comes out of the smokestack. The reason I am familiar with that, I was talking to a charcoal plant that was going to build there, in the city of Boligee. They had developed a new acid burner to go on smokestacks that emitted no pollution.

Mr. McCray: A number of years ago we did a waste load allocation study of the Warrior River, which indicated what waste load each existing industry could put in the river. The goal was to make the river fishable and swimable by 1985 and the Warrior River has reached that. The industries in this area were most cooperative, most of them spent large sums of money cleaning up their act. Any industry that comes along now, they have got to apply for a permit and they will be told what waste from their factory, I am talking about the manufactured waste, if sodium or something is a by-product of that, how much of that they can put in the water and keep

the water at a safe level for fish and vegetation. So, on the environment I think right now we have both air and water pollution laws that will keep the environment in pretty good shape. You are not going to have the problem of coming and putting in a plant that is really going to damage the environment. Now, you know you read alot in the paper about the hazardous wastes in Sumter County, and of course that is the disposal of hazardous wastes. It is a very serious problem and it has to be watched closely. But most factories this day in time have got to have permits for air and water pollution.

Selvin Green: Is there something that might control possible noise pollution?

Mr. McCray: Well, noise pollution is a serious thing, and we have not had a problem with noise, as they have had in many areas. This type of pollution has not been addressed as closely as water and air. But, if there is an increase in activity, where there is a high increase in noise decibels, that is going to have to be increased, but as of right now, we are the metropolitan planning organization, and that is for transportation, and we have to do certain noise invadement studies to determine what the noise factors are. We have not really had a problem. Now, there are some industries that within the industry, the machinery and the grinding and things that require employees to wear earplugs, for example, but it is not generally where it is dangerous to the population.

Anita Parker: How can we get more qualified teachers in surrounding counties?

Mr. Butler: We talk about the problems we educators have -- we say give us more money. One thing is that we can move some of the people out that we have in classrooms, and we can raise the educational level up, and maybe we can convince some of you people that teaching is an honorable profession and that you would want to be a part of it. Of course, we are talking about money, we are talking about somebody sweeping the floor at B.F. Goodrich making more than our school teachers with a four year college degree. We are talking about many of the things he (McCray) experienced as the staff member of a congressman, constant pressure on the people in the profession. Too many people in the education profession are not hearing the good things they are doing, and they are doing an outstanding job, particularly if you consider the financial outlay per pupil expenditure in the elementary and secondary schools in this state.

But I think we need to shape up our act a little bit as professionals, I think we need to expect more of students, I think standards have been too low for too long. Social promotion was an acceptable thing for a number of years, not

only in Alabama but nationwide. For many of us, we tried to see the little wagon get pulled back around to the point that we have accountability so that students know what is expected of them, they know what they have got to do to get the job done to get that diploma, and we do a good job teaching them. Once we bring the educational level of the communities up I think we can look at some of these better prospects, some of these better industries might start considering us some, but as long as we have got 6.7 percent of the citizens of Hale County with college degrees I doubt we are going to get many high tech industries.

So we have got to set some goals, we have got to set some standards so we won't accept any less in our school systems and that is not only students but that is for teachers and administrators as well.

Rolando Outland: Do you think the fact that students are not getting a good education is due to them not wanting to study some, or is it due to teachers not making their classes interesting enough, and why?

Mr. Butler: I think the primary reason students are not getting any better education than what they are getting is due to the financial situation. When you realize we spend, in Alabama, $20,000 to $30,000 per classroom less than the national average each year, yet our test scores statewide exceeded the national average on the California Achievement Test most recently given this past April, I think that we will have to go back to what Dr. Terrell Bell said in Guntersville a couple of years ago - "You people in Alabama are doing a good job." We hear the negative so many times, it is time that we hear the positive things. With a little more money we could provide some better opportunities for you in your schools, which would provide some better courses that you could choose from, students like you, people who are going to contribute, people who are going to contribute to the development of the local communities and the state. But with our set money those choices that you have, those prerequisites to these professions that you might consider going into will not be available to you, it will not be there for you to take, should you have the effort and desire to take them. So money is the main thing.

Secondly, and the state board is doing it now and it is in place, we have got to get a better product, we have got to get a better teacher. We had social promotion at the same time we thought everybody should go to college and have a college degree. And for too long, if you could not go in any other profession, you could certainly go into education. Fortunately, we have some minimum standards for teachers now. I think you are going to see a better teachers in the future.

Mark Skelton: How can we get these financial aids we need to improve our schools?

Mr. Butler: I think an informed public is the main thing. It concerns me what Mr. McCray said here a while ago about the younger people are the ones who participate in the electoral process in a small degree in comparison to the middle aged people. Middle age people seem to be voting more, and if the young people do not vote, I am not sure that what you want done and your desires are ever going to be known by your public officials. You are not going to elect the people that can do the things that you want done. I think again it goes back to the educational level. People have got to understand that you cannot be passive, you cannot just stay home and let somebody else go vote that one vote. Your vote is important and you have got to vote. You have got to get involved. You have got to become members of organizations that support those ideas that are important to you. You have got to become leaders.

Selvin Green: You mentioned that informing the public would probably help get some of this money needed to better the schools. Do you think that the schools in Hale County are going about informing the public in a positive manner?

Mr. Butler: Probably not adequately at all. We started some things, and some of them, I think, have been somewhat effective. We certainly are negligent in this area, just as most public schools are. We could give alot of excuses as to why the public does not know any more about the schools in Hale County than what they do. To be quite honest with you, a great part of that responsibility or fault lies with me. One of my responsibilities is public relations. I think the local schools are not informing their public either about what is going on in the schools. Most recently we conducted a community meeting. I evaluated principals and supervisors in my county for the first time in the last two years for the first time ever. And one area I evaluated them on was their public relations effort. Therefore, many of the schools have begun to publish newsletters to be sent home to the parents. Because of a lack of newspaper, we have one local weekly that is very receptive to receiving materials from the schools that will inform the people, but because of a lack of radio and television coverage it is difficult at times. I am not so sure we inform our students enough about what is going on, who in turn can talk to their folks about what is going on in the schools. I think the students, too many times, have to just find out about something, rather than being informed about what is going on.

Mr. McCray: Let me respond briefly to what he said about more important schools, about Mr. Butler's solution to more money. You know, the average person today, when he makes a

dollar, in the neighborhood of 35 to 40 cents of that goes to taxes before he gets his hands on it. So the things that you think need to be done, you have got to pay for them. They are expensive, good schools cost money, buildings cost money, teachers cost money. I see in our area the one thing that we need to do is have more pride in our schools and less emphasis on the non-educational aspects of our schools. I think that got out of hand, and I went to school at Hale County High School in Moundville and participated in sports there. But I believe in what is being advocated in Texas, that school bands and football teams takes the place of good physics and algebra and English, and we had better get back to educating our young people. We can never break out in this part of the country until our people are educated and learned and want to upset some things. If we just appropriated more money tonight, we would not necessarily have better schools tomorrow. We have got to have better prepared students, we have got to be prepared to pay teachers. I agree with what he said about the factory worker making more than that. But, I want to tell this one story. I read in the paper this morning that a janitor of a school in Mississippi is retiring after some 45 years and he has a standard offer to anybody that comes in his school, that he will give them $100 if they can find a footprint anywhere in that school. That is how clean he keeps the school. He is proud of his work, he is proud of his job, and that is what all of America has got to do. Whatever you do, you have got to be proud, and you have got to do a good job. Whether you are teaching school, I used to teach school too, and that is the most satisfying thing in the world, is to teach. We need good teachers, but we need dedicated teachers, and we need those who are concerned with improving your mind and preparing you for the future. You have got to go out and talk to your parents about better schools, and paying teachers.

(End of Panel Discussion)

ADJOURNMENT